The Cup of Loving Service

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Easter 1911

From Grandma

THE CUP OF
LOVING SERVICE

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THE CUP OF LOVING SERVICE

BY

ELIZA DEAN TAYLOR

"And a little child shall lead them."
—ISAIAH xi: 6

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TO

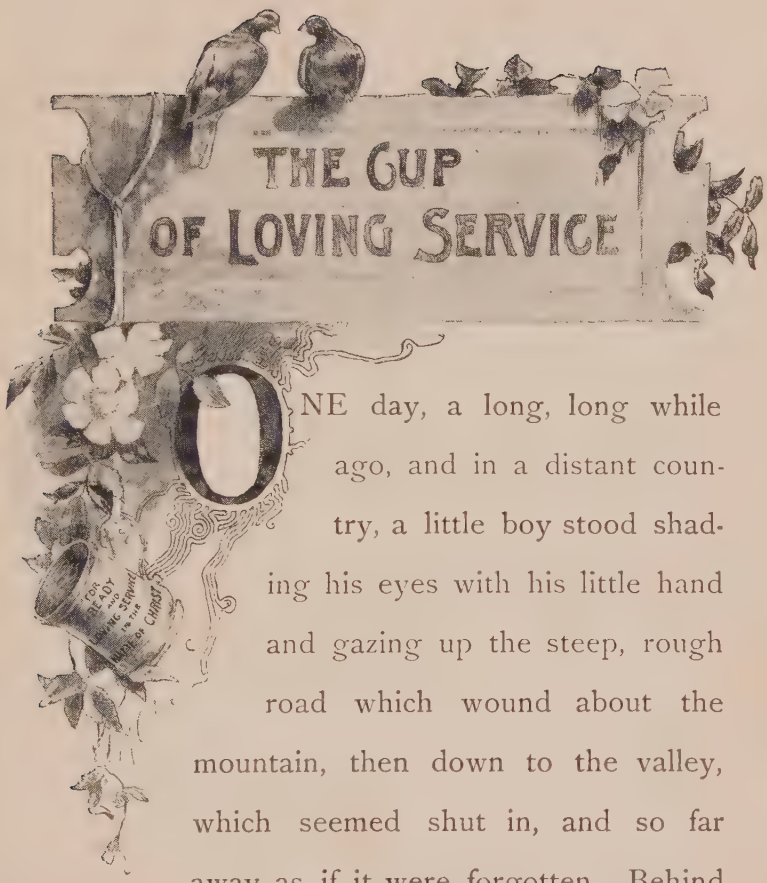
MY MOTHER

PREFACE

YIELDING to solicitation, I send forth this little book, and I think, if we all try to possess and to keep the jewels that the little lad names in the story, we shall find that there are many Cups of Loving Service that each one of us can fill.

E. D. T.

NEW YORK, 1890.



THE CUP OF LOVING SERVICE

ONE day, a long, long while ago, and in a distant country, a little boy stood shading his eyes with his little hand and gazing up the steep, rough road which wound about the mountain, then down to the valley, which seemed shut in, and so far away as if it were forgotten. Behind

him was a small house, not much more than a cabin, set in a patch of grass and garden. Yet, with all its signs of poverty and isolation, it bore, somehow, the evidences of carefulness and content.

The child looked a moment longer, then, running to a small

shed adjoining the house, he took from a peg within his reach a pewter mug, a tin pail and cover, and a coarse but clean cloth from the next nail, and hastening to a spring near by, and almost hidden by an overhanging rock, he filled his pail with the clear, cool water, covered it tightly, and bound it round with the cloth — for the day was warm and in all the fulness of noontide; then, fastening the cup to the belt about his waist, he ran swiftly and began the toilsome ascent of the mountain, his little face aglow with the intentness of his errand.

He came at last to the spot at which he had been looking—for his eyes had learned all the signs of danger and distress in this wild moun-

tain region. A traveller had dismounted from the horse which stood by him, and was lying

down as if prostrated by the heat or from weariness after a long ride in the saddle. Pale

and travel-stained, he had about him the unmistakable appearance of distinction.

The lad put down the cup and pail, and stood for a moment as if uncertain how to proceed — he was such a little fellow; then, uncovering the pail and getting down quite close to the man, he carefully slipped his hand underneath the head, saying:

"Please wake up, sir; I know you must be thirsty, and it is so warm to-day; please wake up."

The man moved slightly, with a murmur of impatience, and, slowly opening his eyes, saw bending over him a little boy's face, and near his mouth was held a cup filled to the brim with the sparkling drink which he had craved for hours.

He drained it at a draught, and, somewhat revived, he raised himself and sat against the trunk of an old tree beside the road where he had halted.

"What angel of mercy sent you to me, child, in this forsaken wilderness? for neither man nor beast has crossed my path, and I have seemed to wander in a maze that leads to nowhere, so far as I can see. How did you know that I was weary and so thirsty? Never was draught so sweet; never was a face more welcome! Give me another cup; to look at it, even, is refreshment."

The boy stooped down, filled the cup, and, lifting it carefully, said, "Let me hold it to your lips, sir; you seem so very tired," and

gently the little fellow poised the cup, the man drinking eagerly again, his eyes looking the while at the bright little face so near his own.

"My good little Samaritan! How can I ever recompense thee? Thou dost not know how much I owe to thee," speaking in his light and inconsequent yet wholly grateful fashion and drawing a glittering coin from a small wallet concealed beneath his coat.

The boy drew back, putting his little hands behind him. "Oh, no, sir! This is the cup that mother says is 'without money and without price,' and although we are very poor, sir, God has been so good to us! For He has given us a beautiful spring which is always run-

ning beneath the rock right by our home; and mother says we must always feel so thankful for it, and we must not forget that verse somewhere in the Bible—'Freely ye have received, freely give.' I believe that's the way mother reads it; and—oh, no, sir; I could not take your money. You see, this is the cup of 'loving service,' mother says, and we must fill it and share it with those who pass by and are very tired and thirsty—like you, sir; and if you'll just look at it, you'll see what mother wrote on it a long, long while ago."

He gave the cup into the man's hand, then, lifting up the pail and standing on a stone near by, he gave the horse to drink of the water that was left. The pail emptied, he took the

piece of cloth and began to brush away the dust from the traveller's coat, one little hand resting on the man's shoulder.

"Can you read the words, sir? Mother wrote them there with a pin or something, so that I might never forget them."

The man had read them. "Yes, child, I can read them: 'For Ready and Loving Service in the Name of Christ!' Child, suppose the spring should cease to flow?"

The little face looked troubled, and, stopping for a moment his busy little hand, and looking off down the mountain toward his home, with almost a sigh he said:

"How could we do without the spring, and the cup never lifted down and filled? But then, sir, I'd still be ready to show the path to those who'd lost their way. But oh, I'm quite sure the spring will always run, sir!"

"Child, for your dear sake, I hope so, and the cup be yours to fill."

The boy was kneeling now close to the man's side, working at a button of the collar, his cheek often in contact with the other's face.

"I suppose you know the story of the cups, sir? Mother says every one has one 'the cup of service,' and some have very many. Away out in the world there are so very, very many, and yours must be very beautiful, I think, for mother says some are of gold and silver, and some just poor, like mine; and mother says all are set in jewels, and that every one must keep their own cups; and unless they're bright and shining they are not 'service cups' and the jewels will look dull. And on every cup

of service there are always the words that are on mine.

"And mother says there is one cup that every one has, never mind if they are rich or poor, and it's called" (going round to the other side, and rubbing at a corresponding button) "it's called the cup of" (thinking) "op-op-oppor-tunities. Mother says I'll understand it when I grow up, but I believe it's to be quite ready to fill the cup with a word of kindness — 'to listen,' mother says, 'when any one's in sorrow; to fill it with the little things that make each other happy' — and we can have that cup, never mind how very, very poor we are.

"Oh, yes; I love to hear the story and all

about the jewels, for they have a name, you know; and yet, although they shine so, you can never see them; and they are not the names of the beautiful jewels mother reads about in the Bible somewhere, for these all round the cups are called courtesy, patience, forbearance, faith, truth, cheerfulness, loving-kindness, honor, self-denial, and one very, very large one, that means all of the jewels, and is called charity; and when I grow up I'll know what they all mean so much better than I do now.

"And mother says that if we love these jewels the cups are never heavy to hold, and that God gives different gifts to fill them. He doesn't give the same to every one. And He

must have been very kind to you, because He's been so very good to us, you see."

Having brushed the coat, he lifted up the cup, and, patting it lovingly with his little hand, said:

"Those other cups, sir, must be very beautiful, for mother says so; but I think I like mine best, for I can take it in my hand, and fill it, and see it hanging up; but all the others you never see at all, although they are always hanging right by every one, ready to be filled. And where do you think they're hanging, sir?—and it's true, for mother says so"—and, standing up, his little face flushed with the knowledge of so strange a fact, "where do you think they're hanging? Why,

mother says they're always — hanging in the heart!"

The man arose, and without speaking walked across the path, and stood looking down the mountain road and way beyond, till he saw a thin, pale curl of smoke over the tree-tops, and turning to the boy, who had been silently fastening the cup securely to his belt, and stood waiting till the stranger should address him, asked:

"Child, is that your home, where the smoke rises above the trees?"

"Yes, sir," he said, coming to his side, "and mother is building a little fire to warm the broth for dinner. She has seen the cup is gone, and she will wait to take the meal

with me. You will find the road all safe, sir; keep on always to the right, and when you reach the valley it is easy then. Were you coming my way, sir? There would be broth enough for you."

"Dear little one, let me lift you in my arms a minute," and, taking up the boy in his strong arms, he carried him to the horse's side and placed him in the saddle, and, standing by him there, said:

"Child, put your arms about my neck, and lay your face by mine, and promise me, when with your mother you say your prayers to-night, you will ask God to help me learn to fill many a cup of loving service as your little hands and heart have filled yours so lovingly

for me to-day. I am going very far away on a distant mission, and your little face will always be beside me; and when I return, if I am spared, I shall come along this mountain road and drink from your loving cup again."

He lifted the child to the ground, bade him hasten, and the boy, looking up with a bright and happy smile, took up the pail and turned with the fleet steps of healthful boyhood toward his home.

The traveller mounted his horse and rode thoughtfully away.

"Oh! loyal, loving little soul! Faithful and true almoner of God's bounty — a bounty of just a little spring which I in my worldliness would fail to recognize as a gift from Heaven, how have my pride and selfishness been rebuked! And when all other gifts had been withdrawn he would 'still be there to show the path to those who'd lost their way.' And then the faith of 'mother says,' and oh, the cups that hang midst all my possessions unfilled and never offered, the golden opportunities unheeded, my blessings all unshared; and do I ever carry in my heart a single jewel that he named? My time and means spent

freely with the midnight cups that are black beside his own! How can I redeem the talents that have been intrusted to my keeping?"

He never saw the child again. A desolating war had overspread the country, and when, after a three years' absence, he was coming eagerly along the rough road again, a box strapped carefully to the saddle, and inquiring of a kindly mountaineer for the little lad, he learned of the dreadful battle which had taken place just there, a retreat followed by the victorious troops, a rush and carnage in the valley, and how the child, with steps like wings, had filled and refilled his pail from the spring, and had gone in so fearlessly among the wounded, holding his cup to many thirsty lips,

and, just at sundown, when giving drink to a dying soldier, a shot had pierced his little heart and torn the cup in two. How at nightfall they carried him tenderly and silently into the thicket, and, digging a grave, the colonel took the little form up in his arms, and, wrapping his own cape about him, laid him in the ground.

"And, sir," said the mountaineer, "they told us that the only prayer was the sobbing of the men. We miss them—the mother and the lad; death did not divide them long; but we're better men, sir, for having known their loving, gentle ways.

"I see, sir, that you're one who has not forgotten his dear face. He seemed never to

think of himself at all; and once, not so very long before that dreadful day, a man came to their home, bringing a box from his master, he said, who was far away, and who had bade him journey to the valley, find the little lad, and say his master sent a little gift to him in token of his gratitude.

"How I can see the child when he showed me the shoes, the soft leather leggings, the cap and jacket, the purse of gold pieces for the mother, and many other things beside. 'Ambrose,' he said, 'I know who sent them; and he told me he'd come again; and I'm sure he will, for he took me in his arms and kissed me; and Ambrose, there was a tear on his cheek when he said good-by—so I must

have all these things on when I run to meet him, for his servant said he'll soon be home; and mother and I pray every night that God will bring him safe across the sea, for all I gave him was a cup of water—so I must be ready to thank him when he comes.'"

Overcome with grief and bitter disappointment the traveller had bowed his head to the mane of his horse, and made no effort to conceal his emotion, and the mountaineer, suddenly made aware that the stranger was indeed the unknown friend, stood in silent and not unmoved sympathy, regarding him; then, going up and laying his rough but honest hand upon the stranger's arm, said:

"Sir, it may be that the cup of water was

sent by God's own hand to be indeed a fountain to make green the waste places in your heart, and from thence to flow clear, loving streams of benefit and blessing, to give comfort and help to many as your years roll on; for I have learned, in my plain, unlettered way, just here among the hills, that we are to be stewards of God's gifts of mind, body, and estate; and we are none of us too poor or too rich to learn that we must be humble and happy accountants of God's mercies — ready and willing cup-bearers, like the little lad."

The traveller held out his hand, and, face to face, in a strong handclasp, the two men, so opposite in condition and circumstances, by a common and sacred memory were brought

for the moment side by side, heart to heart, never to meet again.

The man lived many years—years of many a struggle with the temptations of a life passed in positions of power and preferment, and, conquering these, he lived Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end.

Afterward, among his treasures was found a carved case, fastened with two gold clasps; opening it, on one side was seen the picture of a little spring beneath a rock, and above, on the wide, white margin, was painted a well-worn cup and pail, and in illuminated letters about them the words:

"For Ready and Loving Service in the Name of Christ."

On the other side, on clear white, in beautiful letters of blue and gold, just these words:

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